DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 213 UD 023 368

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TITLE Educational Technology: A Black Perspective.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Stereotypes; *Black Students; Computer Assisted Instruction; *Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mass Media Effects; *Racial Discrimination; *Self Concept

ABSTRACT

The emphasis of this paper is on the effects of educational technology on black youth. Educational technology, however, must be viewed in the context of the ethnic and cultural diversity of our society as a whole and of the microcosm that constitutes the classroom. Anything that transpires in the classroom is impacted upon by outside forces such as the mass media. The media, and particularly television, contribute to the overall stereotyped negative images of Blacks held by the majority of Americans, both black and white. For black youth, it is essential that educational technology be used deliberately to counteract the negative racial images that permeate the media. This means that educational technology should not be used to facilitate superficial training of black youth by teachers who hold stereotypes regarding their students and leave them to their own devices in self-paced electronic centers. Instead, educational technology should be used carefully to allow as much student-teacher interaction as is needed and to progressively diminish racism rather than nurture it. (CMG)

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ED240213

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EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY: A BLACK PERSPECTIVE

Although this paper will place emphasis on the effects of educational technology on black youth - it will also stress that in the forefront of singling out one segment of society is the fact that present technology affects us all.

The dimension of educational technology has been recognized as a significant concept in the teaching and learning process, and theories with respect to its use abound. Varying appraisals of educational technology are recurrent in the literature but on one point most of them agree: there is the danger of dehumanizing education by inappropriate use of technology. But more than this, educational technology can only be effectively applied when society is viewed from a realistic perspective. Unfortunately, many professionals are prone to develop models for learners based on pre-television environments, with planning assumptions too often based on economic and social parameters.

Stakenas and Kaufman compared principles of educational technology that had been formulated by The Commission on Instructional Technology, Scanlen and Weinberger and The White House Conference on Children. They noted in this literature review that all three sources place emphasis on the appropriate use of both human and nonhuman learning resources to facilitate learning.[1]

More than a decade has passed since the 1970 White House Conference on Children, but the issues raised in the Conference Report are still relevant, and to-date, for the most part, have not been implemented. The Conference

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proposed a teaching and learning design which:

A. Identifies needs of learners, individually and collectively.

B. Determines what must be done to meet those needs and considers alternative solutions and options.

C. Involves individual learner in selecting the best way to meet his needs.

D. Designs and implements the selected strategies and tools.

E. Evaluates their effectiveness.

F. Revises when necessary.[2]

While educational technology can play a critical role in implementing this design, it does not approach the degree of essentiality that characterizes the role of the human teacher.

The foregoing observation suggests a dichatomous view of teacher vs. technology. Fortunately, this view is rapidly fading from the educational horizon, as the writing of Cleary illustrates. He views educational technology as being concerned with the overall methodology and set of techniques employed in the application of instructional principles. When a teacher compliments a child who completes in a satisfactory manner a task which he/she initiated he/she employs educational technology to the same extent as when a child responds to "a fully automated system."[3]

Stakenas agreed more or less with this humanist view when he wrote:

> For many, technology is equated with things such as assembly lines and hardware, e.g. computers, television etc. This is unfortunate because it should also be seen as a process -- the application of logical reasoning and science to the identification and solution of human problems.[4]

Earlier in this paper, I alluded to the fact that educational technology in the classroom could only be assessed after one had taken a hard look at its impact on society and the students who are being taught by use of the newer technology. As we proceed through the Computer Age we face the frightening fact that Computers are becoming more and more sophisticated and complex to the extent of performing tasks too complex for humans to manage. As stated by Cleary, "In some cases the speed and scale of the response required from the training system is beyond the ability of a human instructor, e.g. in flight simulators".[5]

Related to the above observation, it is no longer science fiction when one reads predictions concerning the classroom of tomorrow. "Future Shock" has passed us by and "1984" is upon us. The late Marshall McLuhan's books have become classics, and the young traditionalist teacher considers her options when technology "replaces" her. Futurist predict that between 1985-1990 - Half of American homes will be connected to a video-data communications network that allows two-way dialog with the instructors, and between 1991-2030 the price/performance ratio of computers will be reduced to one-sixteenth its current value, and hardware costs will be nominal.[6]

William Stockton, Director of Science News of the New York Times has reported that the world's philosophers, mathematicians, linguists, psychologists, electrical engineers and computer scientists are working to create machines that will think. "If they succeed - and they think it's a matter of when, not if - life may never be the same." He further observes that

> ...artificial-intelligence researchers are developing computers that can listen to spoken sentences and grasp their meaning; that can read news stories and write succinct, accurate, grammatical summaries; that employ robots, who never get bored, to work on assembly lines; that assemble data about a sick person - and suggest a diagnosis.[7]

Such observations surely intensify the need for careful planning. Again, humanists, technicians, and educators must work together to prepare for the inevitable. But as we plan for the future we must consider the present environmental press and its impact on the use of educational technology in the classroom today as well as in the near future.

Paramount in this consideration must be the realities of the ethnic and cultural diversity of our society as a whole as well as the microcosm that constitutes the classroom. Herein, is the central and recurring theme of this paper. As will be highlighted later, the choice of content for technological software for educational purposes can determine whether or not racism in our society is nurtured or progressively diminished.

The classroom can no longer be viewed in isolation; at the present time everything that transpires in the classroom is impacted upon by the outside forces - television and to a lesser extent by the press and radio. Steinberg asserts that "teachers who refuse to recognize the influence of mass media in the lives of their students turn away from a confrontation with reality".[8] For example, the vocabulary of the average youngster has increased dramatically in quantity and sophistication compared to the pre-television period.[9] This is not only true of his vocabulary but of his knowledge of current trends and events, geography, and other cultures. Television is viewed by all races and economic groups. It speaks to the masses as well as to the elite. Television has been called the liberator

and the emancipator, since through this medium isolated segments of the population have been introduced to the mainstream. The latest census report shows that there is at least one television in 98% of all U.S. homes, therefore majority and minority youth have equal access to this gigantic force. Further surveys show that viewing habits vary only slightly among all elements of the population regardless of economic strata or racial make-up.

Television as a social and psychological force is unequaled by any other medium "It informs. It educates. It communicates. It entertains. It Influences". Commenting on this point, Rawles states that the child and the young adult learn more about his world through this medium than through any other.[10]

In the preceding statements attention was directed to the fact that television influences. This term has great significance when black youth are considered. In her study "The Effect of Media on Black Images," Rawles found that media contributed to the overall stereotyped negative images regarding blacks, held by the majority of the American populace.[11] For black youth, this creates an identity crisis. Black parents and leaders such as the Reverend Jesse Jackson encourage youth to internalize the belief that, "I am somebody," while the media bombards them with negativeness. The White House Conference Report expressed succinctly this dilemma of black youth: "Everything in our society tells them they are inferior to or less important than middle class whites. Our schools must correct that stigmatizing and paralyzing message.[12] The white child is also being influenced by what he reads and sees on the screen and this too perpetuates the myths of racial inferiority. Rawles summed up the black identity problem when she wrote that "Unfortunately, the myths and stereotypes

that influence what others think about Blacks also influence, to some degree what Blacks think about themselves".[13]

At the risk of "overkill" on this point, yet another illustration is cited. The White House Conference Report on Children in 1970 voiced this concern and alluded to the fact that "although it is clear that the mass media can make significant contributions to human development, more often they present programming which tends to perpetuate a certain narrow version of human behavior".[14] Along this same line Rawles writes:

> His sense of his own worth in the world tends to be distorted and he views his failures as an aberration of behavior, never questioning the validity of the myth.[15]

The above paragraphs have emphasized the need to assist the black youth in the creation of a positive self-image. Educational technology can be made to contribute to the achievement of this task, but not without deliberate planning toward this end.

As early as 1928 the yearbook of the Department of Superintendence of the NEA proposed that the high school curriculum should promote:

1. an understanding and evaluation of self.
2. an understanding and appreciation of the world of nature.
3. an understanding and appreciation of organized society, forces of law and of love that are universally operating.[16]

Since that time the needs of youth have been identified by Robert J. Havighurst in the form of developmental tasks; and in 1952 by the Educational Policies Commission which offered a statement of the "Ten Imperative Educational Needs of Youth." "A Bill of Rights for American

Youth" has been proclaimed and, of course, the "Seven Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education' have similarly contributed to the identification of the developmental needs of youth. Black youth are no exception, and as they attempt to function in today's society, they too have the same basic needs as youth from all other segments of the population. But for the black youth, an overriding need is the need to be taught to think positively about himself and others.

Those who teach black youth must not inflict prejudices, and hold on to myths regarding his needs based on stereotypes. Implications abound here for well-chosen applications of educational technology. Leaders such as Jesse Jackson, and Arthur Ashe, need universal support in their PUSH to promote educational ideals that incorporate positive self-images.

Educators, psychologists and behaviorist must work together to meet the needs of black learners, but they must not assume that because of the economic status of black students they are "lazy", "do not want to learn" or "can't learn". Thus, with the abundance of new technology in the classroom, the teacher should not employ "learning at one's own rate" as a "cop out" in order to neglect black youth. Given the negative image of himself that is often developed from his society, he will "learn nothing". Consider the following scenario in the life of Jesse Jackson

> Teachers shouldn't give up trying to reach kids! I remember trying to learn fractions. Just couldn't! Then my teacher, Mrs. Walker, came to class with two dollars in coins. "This dime equals ten cents, one tenth of a dollar. This penny equals one cent, one tenth of a dime..." and immediately, I began to understand fractions. She could have given me a test and after I failed it concluded I was dumb. But she wouldn't. She sought alternative explanations. She knew the real meaning of teaching.[17]

This paper has attempted to make three points:

1. Educational Technological hardware should be used as a means to an end. Making advancements in computer technology must not be viewed as a process for diminishing the need for teacher-student interaction in a classroom setting.

2. Black youth, having been exposed to the same mass media developments as all other youth in their generation, need the application of educational technology deliberately developed to counteract the negative racial images that permeate mass media.

3. In the classroom educational technology should not be used to facilitate superficial training of black youth by teachers who hold stereotyped beliefs regarding their students. In the classroom they should not be left to their own devices in effective "self-paced" electronic learning centers.

[1]Robert G. Stakenas and Roger A. Kaufman. Costs and Effectiveness of Technological Applications in Education: A Literature Review (Tallahassee, Fla.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service. ED 169922, 1977), p. 9.

[2]Report of the White House Conference on Children (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1970) p 433.

[3]Alan Cleary, Terry Mayes, and Derek Packham, Educational Technology: Implications for Early and Special Education (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), p. 2.

[4]Stakenas, p. 6.

[5]Cleary, p. 2.

[6]George M. Eberhart, "Academic Libraries in the Computer Age," College and Research Libraries News 42 (February 1981) :30.

[7]William Stockton, "Creating Computers that Think," New York Times Magazine, December 7, 1980, Sec. B, p. 41.

[8]Charles S. Steinberg, "Mass Media and the Educator," The Educational Forum 29(May 1965):397.

[9]John D. Pulliam, Mass Media Values and the Future of Education (University of Oklahoma: ERIC Document Reproductions Service, ED 180901, N.D.), p. 5-6.

[10]Beth Rawles, The Media and Its Effect on Black Images (West Hartford, Connecticut: ERIC Document Reproductions Service, ED 158300, 1975), p. 15.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Report of the White House Conference on Children, 1970, p. 358.

[13]Rawles, p. 1.

[14]Report of the White House Conference on Children, 1970, p. 326.

[15]Rawles, p. 326.

[16]Ross L. Neagley and N. Dean Evans, Handbook for Effective Curriculum Development (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 25.

[17]Interview with Jesse Jackson, Leanner Landsmann, Instructor 88 (September, 1978):33.